

## **Cairngorms National Park Local Plan Consultation**

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**Purpose:** To provide the ViSIT Forum with the Recreation & Access and Tourism chapters of the draft Cairngorms National Park Local Plan and encourage members to respond individually to the ongoing consultation.

### **1. Introduction**

The draft Cairngorms National Park Local Plan is currently out for consultation, with an extended deadline of 28<sup>th</sup> February 2006 for responses. Much of the plan has relevance to the tourism sector, but there are specific chapters relating to Recreation & Access and Tourism, and these are included below. The full local plan is available electronically from the CNPA website

[www.cairngorms.co.uk/planning/draftlocalplan.php](http://www.cairngorms.co.uk/planning/draftlocalplan.php) and hard copies are available to view at the CNPA offices in Ballater and Grantown-on-Spey.

The local plan also includes settlement plans for the communities within the park. Again these can be downloaded from the CNPA website. On the maps, the settlement zoning shows areas zoned for tourism development as a purple colour. However tourism-related activity is not restricted to these zones and reference should be made to the relevant tourism policies included in the accompanying settlement statement.

Members are encouraged to view the plan, and respond to the consultation if they wish. Consultation responses should be sent to CNPA, Station Square, Ballater, AB35 5QB or e-mailed to [planning@cairngorms.co.uk](mailto:planning@cairngorms.co.uk).

### **2. Extract from the Draft Local Plan: Recreation & Access**

3.62 The Cairngorms National Park is a popular venue for a wide range of recreational activities both organised outdoor sports and informal activities. From hillwalking and mountaineering to skiing, canoeing, cycling, horse riding, dog walking and golfing, the Cairngorms National Park can provide opportunities for most recreational pastimes that are possible in Scotland. As long as these activities are conducted in a 'responsible' way, most can be done without conflict with land managers, other recreational activities or significant disturbance or harm to wildlife.

3.63 The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 gave everyone in Scotland a statutory right of responsible access to most land and water. The Act also requires Access Authorities (The Cairngorms National Park Authority being the access authority for the Park) to both uphold the public's access rights and to identify a system of paths ('core paths') for the purposes of giving the public reasonable access throughout their area.

- 3.64 Rights of way and core paths are protected through general policy 2, but public access rights in all their forms are protected by policy 26. The National Park Plan will contain an access strategy for the Cairngorms National Park that will set out how the National Park Authority and partners will promote and manage access across the Park.

#### **Policy 26: Access Rights**

**Development proposals which would result in a significant loss to the public of access rights, or loss of linear access such as core paths, rights of way, or other paths, or loss of access to inland water will only be permitted where an appropriate or improved alternative access solution can be secured.**

- 3.65 In addition to the informal recreation activities that are supported by the public right of access and the management of paths and tracks for recreation, the Park has a number of formal outdoor recreation centres that are located outside of the settlements in the Park. The ski centres at Cairngorm, the Lecht and Glenshee are the largest of these facilities, but the watersports centres at Loch Morlich and Loch Insh, and the National Outdoor Training Centre at Glenmore Lodge are also important facilities.
- 3.66 The three ski centres, which are all situated on land where general policies 2 or three apply, are all vulnerable to changes in climate and are all constrained from significant expansion by natural heritage designations. They are also visually prominent in the landscape and require careful management to minimise the effects of skiers and other users during winter and summer.
- 3.67 The National Park Authority recognises the economic and recreational benefits that these centres provide for the National Park's residents and visitors, and Policy 27 supports appropriate diversification of the centres to develop year round activities based on the high quality environment of the Cairngorms area. Smaller outdoor centres or activity centres are considered as businesses and policy 22 will not apply to associated development proposals.

#### **Policy 27: Large Outdoor Recreation Centres**

**Development proposals for the provision of additional outdoor recreation facilities, diversification of outdoor recreation-related business activities, or for the enhancement of facilities in terms of quality and design at existing outdoor recreation centres will be supported where they demonstrate best practice in terms of sustainable design and business.**

**Proposals for new ski tows at existing ski centres will only be permitted within the existing ski areas. Extensions to ski areas will not be permitted.**

### 3. Extract from the Draft Local Plan: Tourism

- 3.68 As one of the principal drivers of the Park's economy, a healthy tourism industry is vital to most communities, as well as to the Park's aims. It also covers a diverse range of activities and development, which is why it is not included within the Business & Economic policy section. There is a need to develop and maintain the range and quality of visitor attractions and facilities to satisfy visitor aspirations and expectations, and to attract more visitors to the area ~ and to stay for longer.
- 3.69 **Sustainable Tourism:** At its simplest, sustainable tourism can be said to be tourism that takes account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities. Making tourism more sustainable means taking these impacts and needs more fully into account in the planning, development and operation of tourism. The CNPA has been awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.
- 3.70 Significant tourism developments should generally be located within or adjacent to existing settlements, where there is service and infrastructure capacity; all proposals which require a site-specific countryside location will require to provide a comprehensive justification for the position, as well as a sustainability impact appraisal. Countryside locations will potentially be ideal for the development of eco-tourism projects, which are likely to be appropriate for the National Park context. Whether within settlements or in the countryside, proposals must be of a very high quality standard, with no significant adverse impact on residential amenity or on the Park's natural & cultural heritage.

#### **Policy 28: Tourism Development**

**Proposals for new or enhanced tourist related facilities/attractions will be favourably considered, where they:**

**Enhance the range and quality of tourism attractions and facilities on offer, and/or lengthen the tourist season, with a beneficial impact on the local economy; any change-of-use within the tourism sector should not adversely affect the quality of standards provided. Proposals should pay particular reference to the ethos of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.**

**All proposals should maintain and enhance the quality of the visitor's experience, and the long-term viability of the local tourism industry; any proposal which would reduce the tourist facilities of an area will be resisted unless the effect can be compensated for/mitigated against.**

- 3.71 A good range and quality of tourist accommodation is vital to a healthy tourism industry. While there is already a large amount of such accommodation within the Park, there may be a need for an enhancement of its quality and range. Every community within the Park should ideally be able to offer a complete range of accommodation to keep visitors within the area, from high quality B&B's/hotels to bunkhouses, campsites and self-catering. There may be opportunities for rural diversification to plug any gaps in the market.

**Policy 29: Tourist Accommodation**

**a) Camp sites: Proposals for the development of new camp-sites, or enlargement of existing, will be permitted on the basis of them making a minimal impact on the environment and landscape. Basic amenities should be provided, but principles of eco-tourism should be applied.**

**b) Caravan parks: Proposals for new caravan parks will not be permitted on undeveloped sites within the Park. Extensions to existing sites may be permissible, but not for static-caravan use. Landscaping and tree-screening will be required. Caravan parks make a considerable visual impact on the landscape and community in which they are sited, and require sites to be levelled and cleared of most of their vegetation, as well as requiring considerable areas and installation of services.**

**c) Chalets/time-share: Proposals for chalets/timeshare, which are most likely going to be in rural/semi-rural locations, should be sited to minimise their impacts; developments screened by woodland settings are preferred.**

**d) Hotels/B&B: Proposals should not have an adverse impact on existing residential amenity, and should be of a scale which respects their setting/context. Any proposal for the change of use of a hotel must demonstrate there is no viable future for its use as such.**

**e) Self-catering/bunkhouses: redundant or derelict buildings can often be utilised for a variety of self-catering purposes; planning conditions will be attached to any permission to restrict their use for tourism purposes, and not for permanent residential accommodation.**

**f) Provision of staff accommodation must be provided by all large tourism developments, given the general shortage of affordable accommodation in the Park area.**